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## Monroe County in the Mexican War

By H. C. DUNCAN

This paper will not discuss the war with Mexico, the cause of the war, its campaigns and results. That is all history and can be found in the many histories of that short but decisive conflict.

By reason of pressing demands on my time I have not been able to give the subject the time and attention I desired and its importance demanded. I was compelled to depend largely upon the memories of persons then living in which two persons rarely agreed. Time had either obliterated the early impressions or had left them so blurred that the information sought was at least of doubtful authenticity. Within the past few years General Oran Perry, a late adjutant general of the State, has compiled a work on Indiana in the Mexican War which has the general orders, proclamations, etc., of the governor and adjutant general of the State covering that period, together with extracts from the newspapers of the time, giving copies of private letters written from the front to individuals and published in the papers, and from letters written to the papers, but nearly all of these were local, referring only to the particular company and concluding with lengthy contemporaneous letters discussing the conduct of the Second Indiana Regiment at the battle of Buena Vista. It has also the roster of the five

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Monroe County Historical Society, Jan. 13, 1911. Judge Duncan died Jan. 30, 1911. See INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY VII, 31.

regiments furnished by Indiana to the Mexican War, together with the mounted riflemen. There is but little in these except to show the time of muster in and out, deaths, discharges and desertions, and nothing showing the residence of the individual soldier.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the opportunities for getting information with reference to the particular part played by Monroe county men in that campaign with all it accomplished, with what it added in wealth and numbers to United States, are indeed meagre. At that time the special correspondent had not been discovered, the modern newspaper had not been developed and there is nothing to which we can go except the ill-kept records and the memories of old people. The former is never of interest, the latter uncertain.

On May 13, 1846, President Polk approved the Act of Congress declaring war with Mexico and calling for 50,000 volunteers to serve for one year, or during the war, and appropriating \$10,000,000 for defraying its expenses. On May 16, 1846, the secretary of war called on the governor of Indiana for three regiments of infantry or riflemen, practically 3,000 men, as its quota. On the 22nd of May Governor James Whitcomb issued his proclamation calling for companies to be raised, each company to report its organization to him as soon as filled and the officers selected, to march to New Albany preparatory to organizing into regiments and to moving on to Mexico, saying the communication from Washington, calling for the volunteers was dated "the 16th and was received late last evening." This you will see was before the days of telegraph or fast mail and required five days to reach Indianapolis from Washington, and then got there "late in the evening."

The order of the adjutant general, accompanying the governor's message goes into very great details of the organization of the troops. It limited each company to eighty privates, four corporals, four sergeants, two lieutenants and one captain. It did not authorize anyone to raise a company, but promised that after a company was filled there should be an election for all of the officers from captain down which

<sup>2</sup> It would be a valuable contribution to State History if some competent person in each county which sent soldiers to the Mexican War would do what the author has done in this paper.—ED.

should be certified to the governor who would issue commissions to the commissioned officers.

At that time Indiana was without any military organization. There had been no war since that of 1812. The country was new, everybody was engaged in subduing the wilderness and in other peaceful pursuits. Peace reigned throughout the country. The old days of militia muster had passed and there was no military establishment from which to draw or around which the military spirit could concentrate. So far as Indiana was concerned the military organization must be built from the ground up. As soon as the governor's proclamation calling for troops was received at Bloomington, recruiting began. Lieutenant Governor Paris Dunning, James S. Hester, Willis A. Gorman and John M. Sluss all had military aspirations and entered into the work of recruiting with energy and enthusiasm. By the 15th of June the full company had been recruited; an election of officers was held and John M. Sluss was elected captain, John Eller, first lieutenant; Aquilla Rogers, second lieutenant, and Thomas Rogers, third lieutenant. The regulation made no provision for a third lieutenant, but nearly all the companies elected one and I have not been able to learn their duties or what became of them. The company was recruited and organized, reported to the governor and commissions received, and the company was ready to march in twenty-four days from the time the governor's proclamation was issued. When it is considered there was no telegraph nor telephone, that mail came only by stage which took a whole day from Bloomington to Indianapolis; that the stage made only about two trips a week, it will be understood that the company was recruited and organized in a remarkably short space of time. On the 15th of June, 1846, the company started to the front. While the company was being recruited the ladies of Bloomington bought the silk and with their own hands made a flag for presentation. This was presented to the company by Miss Sarah E. Markle, late the wife of our honored and esteemed fellow-townsmen, William F. Browning. Fortunately the speech of presentation has been preserved and is as follows:

"Gentlemen of the Monroe Guards: On behalf of the ladies of Monroe County, I present to you this flag, and with it their warmest applause

for the choice you have made. You are about to sacrifice the comforts to which you have been accustomed, to undergo and endure the privations of a soldiers' life, and to exchange your peaceful and happy homes with their cheerful firesides for the field of battle and camp life. Yet in this there is no cause for regret. You make the sacrifice not at the call of a despot nor to satisfy a criminal ambition, but in the name of that beloved liberty which is dearer to you and to us than life. Your choice is that of patriotic, brave men, and as such we honor it and you. And while you are fighting the battles of our beloved country for liberty, thereby endangering your lives, we shall wait with impatience for the glad tidings of your welfare and success. A portion of the glory achieved by you will be reflected upon the thousands who are here today to say goodbye and to bid you Godspeed and to pledge you our prayers and good wishes for the glorious triumph of this flag and of our country.

"Take this flag as the emblem of liberty and union and may its presence ever be the true emblem of the downfall of the enemies of American freedom."

It is not certain just where the presentation took place. One who was present says that it was in front of the Butler Corner, now the Bowles Hotel. Another who was also present, says that it was on the common just east of the Christian church. Mr. Markle, the father of Miss Markle, lived in the two story, hewed log house in which Elias Able died, at the southeast corner of Rogers and Seventh streets. The departure of this company was a sad day for Bloomington. Many of the best young men were going to a foreign land, to an inhospitable climate, to endure the hardships of a military campaign. They were to go to New Albany where they would be organized in regiments. There was no railroad and the farmers of the community gave a lift with wagons and teams. Our old friend, Esquire William L. Adams, was then a young man of seventeen and at the time was working for Isaac Buskirk, who lived near Mt. Gilead church on the Unionville road. He had two boys in the company and sent a wagon which Esquire Adams drove. John Whisenand, Isaac Whisenand, James Storms, David Rader and Joseph Dearman all sent wagons. The line of march was down Walnut street on to the Salem road, past Fairfax, where the company camped the first night, on through Heltonsville, Leesville and Salem to New Albany which was reached on the third day. The company went into camp there and became Company A of the Third regiment, commanded by Colonel

James H. Lane of Lawrenceburg, afterwards a major general in the Civil War and a United States senator from the State of Kansas. At that time the science of war had not advanced to its present efficiency. The volunteer army of this State was organized on a decidedly democratic basis. Both the field and line officers were elected by the men of the regiment, the staff officers were appointed by the President and the non-commissioned staff by the colonel of the regiment. While the company was the actual unit in the Mexican war, it was designated by name. Each company had a name and carried it with it into history. The men were not known as members of a regiment or brigade, but of a certain named company. Thus Captain Sluss's company was the "Monroe Guards," the company from Lawrence county, the "Lawrence Grays," the Brown county company, "Brown County Blues," the Greene county company, "Greene County Volunteers," etc.

The men furnished their own clothing, although subsequently they were reimbursed by the government. This company got its uniforms at New Albany, which consisted of a gray cashmere sack coat with black velvet stripes up the front, pants of the same material with black velvet stripes up the legs, broad brim, gray hat with the brim turned up at the side. By an order from the ordinance office at Washington, the Indiana troops were to be supplied at Baton Rouge with musketry and accoutrements, forty cartridges and two flints for each musket. The old muskets issued were pretty crude. They were smooth bored with flint locks and muzzle loaders. The cartridges were hand made and consisted of one large ball and three buck shot.

Of course there was great enthusiasm manifested during the organization of the company. The military spirit was thoroughly aroused. A desire to march into the enemy's country and to resent the insults to the flag were manifested on all sides. Some of the volunteers in their fiery zeal while on the streets of Bloomington delighted to shoot down imaginary Mexicans who might be straying into the interior. Two of these blood-thirsty ones, who delighted in this harmless but appalling pastime, after marching to New Albany and seeing the probabilities of war, remembered the helpless

condition of loved ones at home, cried and begged so piteously to be returned that Captain Sluss permitted them to go.

This company was mustered into the United States service by Colonel Churchill of the regular army on June 22, 1846, and on the 8th or 9th of July took a steamboat for New Orleans, where it landed on the battlefield just below the city on the 15th, and was immediately transferred to ocean vessels and started to Point Isabella at the mouth of the Rio Grande, at which point the boat arrived in three days, when a storm came up which blew the vessel out to sea where it remained eight days, buffeting the waves. Nearly everybody on board suffered from sea-sickness, but the vessel finally landed in safety. I have not been able to get the name of this ship. The regiment was in Taylor's army, participated in the battle of Buena Vista and companies A and B under the direct command of Major Gorman brought on and closed the battle.

After the expiration of its term of enlistment the company came home by steamboat to Madison, then by the old Madison and Indianapolis road to Columbus and from there marched to Bloomington. On its return a big barbecue was given in Dunn's Woods, now the College Campus. Speeches were made. Every man was made a hero and a general glorious time was had. Long trenches were dug in which great quantities of wood were placed which was fired. Cattle and sheep, furnished by the farmers of the community, were butchered and barbecued over the roasting coals.

The members of this company were: John M. Sluss captain, Henry R. Seall first lieutenant, Allen Crocker second lieutenant, Isaac S. Buskirk first sergeant, William C. Foster sergeant, James Frits sergeant, Edward J. Pullen sergeant, Robert K. Nelson corporal, Daniel Iseminger corporal, Dudley Rogers corporal, Richard Radcliff corporal, William B. Crocker musician, E. F. Harney musician. Privates: Owen Adkins, Oliver Adkins, John M. Armstrong, W. G. Applegate, Benjamin Bruner, William Boyd, William Campbell, James A. Dale, James I. Davis, Christopher C. Fleener, Garlin F. Fleener, James Fleener, John B. Givens, Robert W. Graham, William H. Harvey, Adam Hunter, William L. Hardesty, Samuel G. Jamison, William Johnson, John Knight, John

B. Langewell, Thomas Langewell, Isaac S. Leabo, James Little, William Lamkins, William J. Lake, John Martin, Elijah Morgan, Thomas McNaught, Trayless Mize, James Matlock, John Nuckles, John Osborne, Joseph W. Pullen, John Phillips, William Rowe, Addison C. Smith, Sylvester Stongar, Strother Stongar, Robert Strong, Leonidas P. Skirvin, Simpson S. Skirvin, John H. Strain, L. R. Thompson, Austin Truit, Samuel S. Taylor, Solon O. Whitson, Numa M. Whitson, Richard G. Walker, Morris L. Baker, George A. Buskirk. Privates discharged: Joseph Thomas, Solomon Langewell, Solomon May, John A. Dale, William McPhetridge, Phillip H. Smith, William Cox, Samuel Sexton.

In the organization there was considerable rivalry for position. Governor Dunning, Captain John M. Sluss, Colonel James S. Hester and Captain Frank Ottwell all wanted to be captain. Sluss was elected. Governor Dunning got an appointment as sutler and none of the others went. Willis A. Gorman was a popular young Democratic politician, who had been a member of the legislature, enlisted among the first, was accused of military aspirations which he denied, took the position of orderly sergeant and in the organization of the regiment was elected major. He served with great distinction, before the expiration of his term came home and was elected colonel of the Fourth regiment. He afterwards was elected to Congress, was appointed governor of Minnesota territory by President Buchanan, was colonel of the First Minnesota regiment in the Civil War and got to be a brigadier general.

Captain John M. Sluss was a large man, a Kentuckian, who had moved here from the Blue Grass part of the State, was an exceedingly popular man, returned and lived to a good old age, honored and respected by everybody as an honest, conscientious, Christian gentleman and a good soldier.

Lieutenant John Eller was a brother of Henry and George Eller, and an uncle of John T. Eller, a very popular man and sheriff of the county at the time he enlisted. He died October 4, 1846. The boat on which his body was being brought home sank in the Mississippi river July 29, 1847, just below Baton Rouge and his body was never recovered. Henry R. Seal

was promoted to first lieutenant from the ranks. He was subsequently a merchant at Ellettsville. Aquilla Rogers was a second lieutenant but resigned. Thomas Rogers was promoted from third lieutenant, died May, 1847, and Allen Crocker was promoted to second lieutenant.

A great many of this company subsequently acquired considerable distinction both in military and civil life. Isaac Buskirk, who succeeded Colonel Gorman as orderly sergeant, was a captain in the Tenth Indiana cavalry. Edward J. Pullen, a duty sergeant, was a colonel in the Confederate army. Daniel Iseminger, a corporal, was a captain in an Iowa regiment and was killed at the Battle of Shiloh in command of the regiment.

Private John M. Armstrong was a captain of Company K of the Fourteenth Indiana and served during the Civil War. James I. Davis, a private, was the first man wounded at the Battle of Buena Vista. He lived south of town near Smithville and was the father of Mrs. John P. Foster and died within the last few years. Private E. E. Heney was a colonel of an Iowa regiment in the Civil War. Private Thomas McNaught was colonel of the Fifty-ninth Indiana in the Civil War, was breveted brigadier general and now lives in Spencer, a hale and hearty octogenarian. Austin Truitt at the Battle of Buena Vista, tore the flag which had been presented to the company by Miss Markle, from the staff, stuffed it in his bosom and carried it back seven miles to Saltillo. George A. Buskirk was a prominent man in this community, was common pleas judge, state agent, member of the legislature, founded the First National Bank of Bloomington, acquired the greatest fortune of any man in the county at that time and died at the age of forty-five. Private Morris L. Baker was captain of Company A of the Third Iowa cavalry in the Civil War, serving over two years. At the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas he was ordered to charge with his own and another company, went into ambush by which his command suffered terribly. Captain Baker and General McNaught are the only living members of the Monroe Guards, who left Bloomington for Mexico on June 15, 1846. John Service, Israel Winkler, Robert Black, John Turner, Lieut. John Eller, John Moore, Robert A. Givens, Benjamin Adkins,

Lieut. Thomas Rogers, and Randolph Sloan died of disease. William B. Holland, James M. Buskirk and David I. Stout were killed at the Battle of Buena Vista.

On the 19th of April, 1847, the secretary of war called for additional volunteers "to serve during the War with Mexico unless sooner discharged," of which one regiment was assigned to Indiana. On the 24th of the same month Governor Whitcomb issued his call "to the brave, enterprising and patriotic citizens of our State to respond to the call." By instructions of the adjutant general the companies, as soon as organized were to report to "Old Fort Clark" near Jeffersonville. Immediately upon receipt of the governor's call the organization of another company was begun in this county which was completed and reported to the governor on May 30, 1847. The company was named the "Rough and Ready Guards," was officered by Captain Daniel Lunderman, William McPhetridge, first lieutenant, Barton Acuff and Thomas A. Reynolds, second lieutenants, and became Company G of the Fourth Indiana, commanded by Colonel Willis A. Gorman. I can find very little of the details of the organization of this company. It was presented with a flag by the ladies of Bloomington, but who made the presentation speech, I am unable to say. The company, after being organized, marched to Columbus, took a train there to Madison and presumably went from there by boat to Jeffersonville. On the 28th of June, 1847, the Fourth Indiana left Jeffersonville for New Orleans on three steamboats, Captain Lunderman's company going on the steamboat "Franklin." The regiment went from New Orleans to the mouth of the Rio Grande and was a part of General Scott's army and with him went to the City of Mexico. The regiment returned to Madison, was mustered out July 16, 1848, came by rail to Columbus and then marched home on foot. A list of the men in this company is as follows: Daniel Lunderman captain, William McPhetridge first lieutenant, Barton Acuff second lieutenant, Thomas A. Reynolds second lieutenant, David Skillman first sergeant, James Eson sergeant, Charles G. Corr sergeant, Archibald F. Umpstadtdt sergeant, Truman Buckles corporal, Henry Baugh corporal, John W. Day corporal, John Sullivan corporal, Columbus C. Mershon drummer, Robert Laudrum fifer. Pri-

vates: Edward Armstrong, George Armstrong, Henry A. Bailey, Jackson Bales, James Bales, Stephen Bales, John Baugh, James Bean, George H. Butler, Morgan Carter, John Chaffee, Lewis Crarey, Robert Daniels, James R. Dearmin, Joel Deckard, Jonas Devenport, Jesse Elsett, John A. Garrett, John Glessner, Abraham Goodnight, Elijah Havvons, Silas B. Hovions, William Hovions, Valentine Heans, William Hunt, Daniel Jacobs, John Jones, Wiley Jackson, Stephen Lindley, George Marshall, William Mattock, John McWaught, Andrew J. Mefford, John Miller, Alexander Moberly, Thomas Pickle, James Richardson, Young I. Robinson, Harmon I. Rockett, Hamilton Slough, Daniel Spencer, Lawson Summitt, George Smith, Caleb H. Stone, James Thompson, William H. Virt, James M. York, David Wooster, John McClure, Samuel Bon-sall, C. S. Chipman, John Neal, Jonathan Bruison, Benjamin F. Welts.

No man of this company was killed in battle although several died of disease. The deaths were William Dawson, Isaac Peterson, William Blair, Hiram Carter, Solomon M. Grunt, Joel Hancock and Henry B. Wilson.

Captain Lunderman was a brother-in-law of Colonel Gorman. Both married daughters of Ellis Stone, a pioneer of Monroe county, who lived in a brick house just south of the Indianapolis Southern Railroad about two miles west of the city. He there owned a large body of land and raised a large family. Caleb H. Stone, a private of Lunderman's company, was a son of Ellis Stone and a brother-in-law of both Colonel Gorman and Captain Lunderman. In the early fifties Captain Lunderman took a body of men from this vicinity and went overland to California, taking with him a drove of cattle. He was a captain of the Twenty-second Indiana regiment in the Civil War, for years a justice of the peace in this city, living on College avenue just north of Third street.

William McPhetridge, first lieutenant, had been a private in Captain Sluss's company, was discharged, came home and assisted Lunderman in raising his company. Barton Acuff lived and died in Ellettsville. Charles G. Corr, a duty sergeant, was for a long time a prominent citizen of Washington township and lived and died a few years ago in this city. George H. Butler, a private, was a captain in the Civil War.

I have not been able to learn of a single man of this company now living. After making very exhaustive investigation and making many inquiries of the old citizens, I have been unable to learn anything with reference to the circumstances of the organization or anything pertaining to the company, except what I find in print.

In the spring of 1847 Congress authorized the organization of the 16th Regulars which was almost wholly recruited in this State and in Kentucky. It was largely a political organization commanded and officered almost wholly by Democratic adherents of President Polk's administration. Company D was recruited largely from this county. James Hughes, afterwards judge of the circuit court, a member of Congress, a judge of the court of claims, and an all around Democratic politician, was first lieutenant, and the officer who did most of the recruiting. Colonel Richard Owen afterwards colonel of the Sixtieth Indiana and from 1863 to 1879 a professor in the State University, was captain of the company. While the company was being recruited, the men boarded at "Bob Farmers" on the south side of the Public Square where the Allen Block now stands. At one time in order to stimulate recruiting Judge Hughes marched the men to Finley's Mill in Brown county, where they remained about ten days being boarded by the farmers in that locality. The men would be formed in a line, the flag unfurled, the drum beat, the fife played, the men marched and counter-marched, but the military spirit was not rampant and but few recruits were obtained in that locality.

The company was filled in about a month, was marched to Columbus, then taken by rail to Madison, then by a boat to Newport, Kentucky, where on May 12, 1847, they started to Mexico, going by boat to New Orleans, then by sailing vessel to the mouth of the Rio Grande and by boat from there to Monterey. Their campaigning was not hard, the most of the time being on detached duty, guarding prisoners. They returned home August 12, 1848. I have not been able to get a list of the men in this command. I have been able to get the names of the following, who, nearly all, lived in Salt Creek and Polk townships: Coleman A. Carter, Jack Wampler, Silas D. Chandler, Robert Rutherford, William Ruther-

ford, Elisha Maples, Benjamin McFarland, Calvin McFarland, Noah Cox, Hiram T. Sherrall, Solomon C. Payne and Jesse Devers; the last was drowned in the Rio Grande. Solomon C. Payne of Paynetown and Hiram T. Sherrall of Bloomington, both veterans of the Civil War, are the only members belonging to that company now known to be living. Dr. Jerry Wooden of Gosport was in the same regiment but in another company.

Of almost three hundred men who went from Monroe county to the Mexican War, I now know of but five men living, General McNaught, Captain M. L. Baker, Solomon C. Payne, Hiram T. Sherrall and Granville Jackson.

To me it is sad that these men who left their homes and their firesides to go into a foreign country to an inhospitable climate, to the burning sands of the Rio Grande and Mexico to fight the battles of their country, to maintain the dignity of their flag, whose bravery, sufferings, and fortitude added so much to the material wealth of the country, who by their valor and patriotism added an empire, should almost wholly be forgotten. What would this country have been without the effects of the Mexican War? Gold taken in a single year from the territory acquired by this conflict would many times pay the expense of the short and decisive campaigns.

It cannot be charged to these men that they went with a mercenary spirit. Their compensation was \$7.00 per month. At the time of enlistment they were required to furnish their own clothing with the promise that it would subsequently be repaid. Much has been written of the glories and achievements of the soldiers in the War with Mexico. O'Harra, a Mexican soldier from Kentucky, wrote the immortal lines which will be found in enduring form in every national cemetery throughout the Union:

On fame's eternal battlefield  
Their silent tents are spread,  
While glory guards with solemn round  
The bivouac of the dead.